

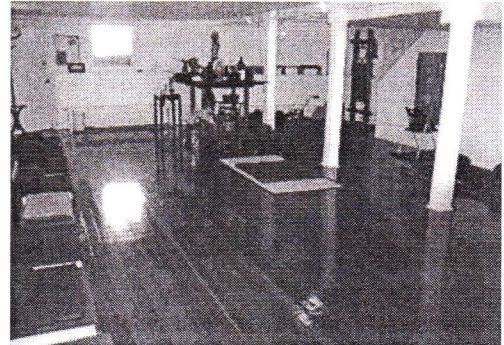
HartfordStreetZen.com
ISSAN-JI
Hartford Street Zen
Center

Newsletter

FALL 2003

HARTFORD STREET ZEN CENTER

is a Soto Zen Buddhist temple located in the Castro district. Started in 1981 by a group of gay and lesbian Buddhist practitioners, HSZC is also called Issanji, One Mountain Temple, after our founder Issan Dorsey Roshi. We offer a daily schedule of Zen Buddhist meditation, Saturday Public Lectures, and a Monthly One-Day Sitting. Our resident teacher is Rev. Myo Denis Lahey.



BRINGING THE WAR
HOME

Excerpts from Myo's dharma talk, March 22, 2003 (Full transcript on our website).

So, are you ready to "bring the war home?" I think I remember that expression from my squandered youth, during the Viet Nam war. Does anybody remember it? Anyway, why not take aim at the big issue? And the big issue can be seen in the tendency we have to say that the war is "over there." But the war is, of course, not "over there." This war began in our hearts, same as every other war. Right now the headlines are being occupied by certain conflicts in the Middle East, but there are quite a few others going on also, some perhaps involving even more inhuman cruelty and confusion. And they are also not "over there;" they are in here [taps chest]. You might protest, "Myo, what are you talking about? I'm a nice person. I do not take arms against others and shoot them if they have something I want or if they say things that irritate me or if I just don't like their

looks. I don't do that." Well, that may be true, and it's not to be made light of. But I think we know that it's not quite so simple. Everyone here is probably a nice person and if called upon to engage in armed conflict might in conscience refuse. But nonetheless, there is something of war about us all the time. And that's what Buddha was talking about, THAT war.

Now, this neighborhood has been unusually noisy the past couple of days, with helicopters and people yelling and screaming and blowing whistles, and it all rather makes my head ache. And then there are the neighbors who periodically party in their back yard at late hours. And then there are some other neighbors with a very big dog, or at least he certainly sounds like a very big dog. His bark shakes the windows, basically. And sometimes they let him out at around 2 a.m., probably to relieve himself, and then he wants to come back in, poor creature, so he barks; it's not an angry bark,

it's a "let me in" bark.

So this goes on for awhile, and then I notice war-like feelings coming up: "Why are those helicopters buzzing my house?" Of course, they're not. So I can start to get irritated, but then I am reminded that this is what "the war" is all about. There is ONE engine of samsara, fueled by greed, hate and delusion. Just one. And all of us give it a little push every time we act, how shall I say, as though we hadn't a clue that there is anything more about us than deluded sentient being. To say, "That's it, I'm just a deluded sentient being," actually would be fairly sophisticated. But most of us don't get that far. It's just an endless push and pull, towards the desirable and away from the undesirable, and when that smooth progress is thwarted, which it very often is, various difficult feelings arise. And the next thing you know, there's war.

So, I must tell you I

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(Continued from page 1)

don't know what to do about it, other than to listen to our Ancestors and try to glean from their teachings something to help us put our feet aright as our path unrolls before us, minute after minute....

There is this calligraphy on the wall of the dining room at Green Gulch, and it says, "Drinking a bowl of tea, I stop the war." If you carried that over to Baghdad with you right now, it might seem rather trite, but there is a profound truth in what it says; that little calligraphy brings the war home, where it belongs. And there is a koan in the tradition: "From where you are now, stop

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scriptions, methods and teachings, and in fact we have some very good ones in this family: "Sit down, straighten your back, lift your breastbone, straighten your head, open your eyes, relax your shoulders, place your hands carefully in your lap, and die." That's all there is to it. ... Be patient. Watch your breathing. Notice that you think things really exist apart from you. Notice that, and let that go, too. Just let yourself breathe and be there.

...This is zazen. This is how it's done, or perhaps how it does you. Very, very simple. Very daunting. ...So don't worry. Do your best. Talk to one another. Look after what needs to be looked after, and when the time comes, as Mrs. Anne Aitken said (Robert Aitken's late wife), "It's like waiting for the

bus: The bus comes along, the doors open, you get on, and you go." Thank you all very much.

HSZC NEWS

Lots of changes. Myo reoriented the zendo, so that the altar now faces East, which is typical of many Asian meditation halls.

Through the generosity of Michael Donnoe of the Sacramento Iron Bell Sanga, we now have lovely, matching statues of Manjushri and Samantabhadra, in white porcelain and the Chinese style, gracing the main altar and flanking Issan's favorite wooden Amitabha figure with the cracked halo.

We have additionally gained some seats, and also it is unnecessary (mostly) for people to cross in front of the altar.

Last winter, we hired Gabriel to paint and now our temple has red doors and refurbished exterior. The broken cement on the pathway into the zendo was repaired and the front metal fences repainted.

The leak on front porch was caulked and the leaky back porch roof repaired. All the house windows were fixed, so that now the upper and lower windows can be raised and lowered.

Judith Keenan helped us a lot by shoring up support under the back porch, and has also drawn up plans for a glassed-in notice board to be placed out in front next to the sidewalk.

But this last will probably have to wait: The needed repairs to the back porch are more extensive than we had realized, and will likely take about **\$6,000** to complete.

For this, and for future projects including replacing the linoleum floor in the kitchen, we would be grateful for any financial help you can give us.

**Residents:**

The residential currents at Hartford St. are shifting and mysterious, as always!

Noah Samuels, Charlotte Richardson and Francois Hussenet have departed, headed in sundry directions. Also, Dominique Zuni left in July to go to India; she's back in S.F. now, and living in the Avenues. Then old friend Jim Biggs was with us for a few months, as was John Wilcox, a young student of Katherine Thanas's at the Santa Cruz Zen Center. Who knows? These guys may be back one day... A bow and a hug for all of them.

As for new residents, long-time HSZC Treasurer Don Herald has moved in. He is a reliable presence in the zendo, morning and evening, as well as the person upon whom doan duties most frequently devolve. Welcome, Don!

Precept Class A class on the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts with Myo ran for five weeks this past June. We barely scratched the surface, and people were looking forward to continuing study of this important topic.

Board President: Lynne Menefee, our outgoing board chairperson, has given much time to HSZC over many years, is now entering a period of greatly increased workload at her job. Let's give Lynne our heartfelt thanks, and welcome Ross Todd, HSZC's new board president.

Commitment Ceremony was held November 16th '02 for HSZC board president Lynne Menefee and her partner Nancy Tucker. "Thank you so much for all your support and smiles and wishes for our commitment ceremony last Saturday. In gassho, Lynne"

Zenshin Philip Whalen: A redwood tree was planted for Zenshin at Green Gulch Farm last winter by Brian Bruning. Also, thanks to Peter and Sam van der Sterre for locating a lovely memorial stone at Tassa-

jara in Cabarga Creek; it's now installed in the HSZC garden. There will be a ceremony to dedicate the stone, and to honor his teaching, presence and life sometime this fall. Stay tuned

GARDEN:

Appreciation to Brian Bruning for his generous donations of plants for our temple gardens. Including a Japanese miscanthus grass called sarabande, a quince with deep red blossoms, a Chinese maple, sangukaku, some pink agapanthus and monstera (Swiss cheese plant) by the Jizo statue.

MICHAEL DONNOE

from the Sacramento Iron Bell sangha donated a collection of excellent books for our library (including all five volumes of the collected translations of Thomas Cleary) and a sweet statue of Baby Buddha which we'll use for the Buddha's Birthday Ceremony, in addition to the two 20th century white porcelain figures of Manjushri and Samantabhadra mentioned. A deep bow of gratitude to you, Michael, for your generosity to Hartford Street.

HSZC Residency & Zen Training:

Myo has been living with us for nearly a year now, and is coming to the end of the agreed-upon "period of mutual inspection and assessment." Myo's comments:

"I had an idea for Hartford St. that I thought would support its (someday?) emerging identity as a place for Zen training. Temples and other such places in Asia typically have what is known as ``pure rules'', or *shingi* in Japanese. These rules apply to the conduct of persons while in the temple, and include points about what to eat, what to wear, how to behave in common spaces, and so on. The ones I thought would be appropriate and desirable for Hartford St. residents were that there should be no use of tobacco, alcohol or recreational drugs at Hartford Street; that meat should not be cooked or eaten

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on the premises; and that residents should not engage in sexual relations on the premises. This was all with a view to creating a visible difference between Issan-ji, and secular, co-operative living situations in middle-class, urban America.

Why create such a difference? In order to conjure up a stouter vessel to contain the energy of Zen practice than had previously existed here. I have come to believe, though, that the reason such a containment vessel hasn't been much in evidence heretofore, is that the people

who might be interested in living at Hartford St. aren't particularly looking for Zen training, per se. Rather, they tend to be seeking a congenial living environment where Buddhist values of various types are respected, and where they can pursue sundry destinies having little explicitly to do with Zen practice, while enjoying the support of a pleasant, co-operative-household-with-basement-meditation-room.

There is nothing wrong with this at all. And though it isn't what I had visualized for Hartford St., I

feel that it is too soon to suggest that we implement "pure rules".

Instead, I would like us to have an arrangement *more* structured than what I found when I moved in, but *less* structured than I have been daydreaming about.

I would ask that residents and visitors alike prac-



tice active respect for the close quarters in which we live at Hartford St., meaning that no private activities would be carried on in such a way that others in the household would be obliged to be participants.

This particularly refers to music, conversations, television/movies, and entertaining guests. Further, we would still agree that there be no illegal drugs of any kind on the property, and that there would be no smoking at all inside the building.

As far as alcohol is concerned, I feel that more discussion is necessary. It

might turn out that people want to be able to serve wine or beer with public, non-retreat meals, but I'm not sure what the consensus is on that.

These are my thoughts thus far, anyway. There are significant implications here both about the future direction of Hartford St. and my participation therewith, and it remains to be seen how that will all play out."



MYO IN ITALY

Myo spent the month of August practicing with the Sanga di Roma, in an old farmhouse in the hills of Umbria. A group of from eight to fifteen participants followed a schedule very similar to that of a Tassajara winter ango (training period). None of the group had done such intensive practice before, with the exception of their priest, Rev. Daro Girolami, and they were all very moved by the experience.



EXCERPT FROM INTERVIEW WITH RON WICKLIFFE

Ron was a generous patron of our temple and member of the HIV sitting group. This interview was conducted a few months before he died.

"Six months ago, that beautiful flower was just a bunch of compost, but now it's a beautiful flower. And in six months it will be compost again. It's the form that keeps going and going, and going.



We can transcend that--we

don't need to be afraid of dying; it's not necessary.

I mean, isn't that what living in the moment is all about? Just realizing we're part of this incredible, beautiful universe. I guess that's why I'm happy... There is nothing lacking in my life. I have wonderful friends, wonderful family, people who love me, people that I love. What more could I want?"

GEORGE GAYUSKI'S ASH CEREMONY AT TASSAJARA.

George Gayuski was a former board member at HSZC and a longtime feature of our Sangha. Below is John King's account of the ashes ceremony at Tassajara.

"It was beautiful. We were on top of the mountain above the Suzuki Roshi Memorial. You can see from the photo of the scattering of George's ashes, how the wind carried them away like phantoms. Before I left Tas-

sajara I planted wild flower seeds over the ashes.

A couple of nights after the ceremony, I dreamt that Blanche and I were leading different processions along a

chanting was in unison, but my procession was off pitch and not so organized. Del Carlson was blessing the processions with the red powder that Hindus

use. He suddenly became George scattering his own ashes over the processions as they passed and bowed to him. He was smiling. I was watching from a distance and just sank to



kind of yellow brick road. In Blanche's procession the

my knees with my hands in gassho."

**PHILIP WHALEN'S HAT**

by Joanne Kyger ©



I woke up about 2:30 this morning and thought about Philip's hat.

It is bright lemon yellow, with a little brim all the way around, and a lime green hat band, printed with tropical plants.

It sits on top of his shaved head. It upstages every thing and every body. He bought it at Walgreen's himself.

I mean it fortunately wasn't a gift from an admirer. Otherwise he is dressed in soft blues. And in his hands a long wooden string of Buddhist Rosary beads, which he keeps moving. I ask him which mantra he is doing - but he tells me in Zen, you don't have to bother with any of that. You can just play with the beads.

PLAYING WITH THE BEADS

Excerpts from Myo's Dharma Talk at HSZC, March 15, 2003

For any of you who knew Philip, this poem actually evokes his spirit most beautifully. And it also evokes the face of our practice which, for all its apparent solemnity, is essentially a type of play. We just play with the beads. We don't bother with mantras; we just play with the beads. And playing with the beads is another name for zazen. If we sit the way Philip was counting his beads, we'll be alright, as he himself would have told us.

It's really not so hard, so why do you suppose



it gives us so much trouble? Or why do we think it gives us so much trouble, when actually, it gives us no trouble at all? Well,

the one answer is attachment. Attachment is the glue that sentient beings use to keep everything together, and when that glue in one way or another dissolves, then no more sentient

being. That's good, right? "Not necessarily," some beings reply! Sometimes we hear about stuff like that and we say, "No, no, no, wait, wait, wait! This is too fast for me; I have too much to do, yet." Well, that's okay... But if there is any attachment in

there, it would be good at least to see it. And it would be good to study that attachment in light of Buddha's teaching of the Four Noble Truths. And it would be good to do that just as though you were playing with the beads.

...So, don't worry. Reverend former abbot Zenshin Whalen, Z-meister as he was sometimes called, I don't think he worried about, "Wait, what teaching am I going to use in this situation?" So that means trusting the Buddha way and trusting that it is not somewhere other than this body mind. And if people think you just did a terrible job, they'll tell you. And you can try harder. But there might not be time for that, either!



NOW and ZEN by Brian Klein

We are pleased and joyful to see the magnificent new paint job given to our HSZC. Who knew that the smell of Sherwin Williams paint and incense could mingle so harmoniously together?

However, the newly repainted entrance to the temple has caused controversy. That bright red door? Some say it's Chinese Red, others that it's Tibetan Red. Actually, it's Elizabeth Arden Red.

Correction:

In the last newsletter it was erroneously reported that Victoria Austin was ordained at same time as Issan. In fact, her ordination date was January 10th, 1982.

GROUPS MEETING AT HSZC

HIV Sitting Group:

Thursday and Friday mornings 10:30am until 11am. Brief meditation instruction.

GMBS Book Study Group:

Thursday evenings 7:15 pm to 8:30 pm. Group discusses books with Buddhist content of interest to the group. Contact: Steve Kline (415) 824- 2671,

OPEN DINNER

fourth Friday each month 7:30 pm. Enjoy a delicious home-cooked meal and mingle with sangha members. Requested donation \$8. Reserve by Wednesday with hostess Mimi:

Mimimanning@earthlink.net or call 415.431.2665.

TEMPLE ACTIVITIES

Appreciation to all visiting and supporting teachers and priests who support our practice. Jana

Drakka, John King, Michael Wenger, Mark Lancaster, Jeffrey Schneider, Kokai Roberts, Mark Livingston, Taiyo Lipscomb, Dave Haselwood, Daigaku, Rin McCarthy and many others.

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Membership at HSZC

HSZC can survive only through the generosity and involvement of our members and donors. Practicing members sit regularly and contribute a suggested \$40 monthly. Contributing members offer \$60 a year; Supporting Members, \$500 or more; and Patrons, \$1000 or more. Anyone, member or not, may join us for zazen at any time. We welcome you to our sangha!

COMMUNITY THRIFT STORE

625 Valencia St. at 17th. 415-861-4910. Please keep your donations of old clothes,

furniture, and books coming. Drop off donations at the side door on Sycamore Alley, and register them to HSZC, account #155.

Newsletter Production:

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Formatting:

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Don Herald



**Public Lecture every
Saturday**

at 10:00 am, followed by tea and discussion.

**MONTHLY ONE-DAY
SITTINGS:**

Typically the first Saturday of each month, from 9 am until 5pm. Participants follow a simple schedule of zazen, kinhin, chanting, and work practice. Two vegetarian meals served. Suggested donation \$40 full day/ \$20 half day.

BEGINNER'S INSTRUCTION:

The third Saturday each month, 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm, for those new to zazen practice. Learn about Zendo forms, meditation posture on a

cushion or bench and walking meditation. Two thirty-minute sittings, followed by tea and opportunities to ask questions and share. Call HSZC to register. Suggested donation \$10.

HSZC TEMPLE SCHEDULE

HSZC offers a traditional schedule of Zen meditation.

Brief **beginner's instruction** Saturday mornings in the zendo from 8:30-9am. Public lecture Saturday 10:00 am.

M O R N I N G :

Monday through Friday

6:00am Zazen

7:00am Morning

Chanting

E V E N I N G :

Monday through Friday

6:00pm Zazen

6:40pm Evening

Chanting

S A T U R D A Y :

Zazen instruction from 8:30 am until 9 am

9:10am: Zazen

10:00am: Public Lecture, followed by tea and discussion. Donations appreciated.

ISSAN-JI

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